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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how teachers are responding to changes in the new global history curriculum and the attendant tenth grade New York Regents examination. It compares the messages broadcast by the new state curriculum and assessment policies with individual interview data collected from ninth and tenth grade New York state global history teachers, expressing differences between the state's and teachers' views in a set of three tensions: (1) major changes v. minor changes in teachers' classroom practices; (2) more ambitious v. more traditional teaching and learning; and (3) clear policy direction v. ambiguity. The study asks the following questions of the relationship between teacher learning and state-level testing: (1) In what ways are tests and test results used in classrooms, schools, and the districts; (2) What do the proposed changes in state-level tests mean for teachers and learners; (3) How are teachers being prepared to respond to the new state assessments; and (4) What challenges do teachers anticipate in moving toward new state assessments? The study draws on both focus group and individual interviews. The individual interview sample includes 16 male and female teachers, from a total of 13 schools, with various years of teaching experience, teaching locations, and grade assignments. (Contains 7 notes, a table, and 29 references; appended is a sample teacher interview.) (BB)

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Teachers, Tests, and Tensions:

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There is a curious gap in the recent talk about national and state education reforms. With attention focused on defining higher expectations for what students will know and be able to do, how teachers will learn the new pedagogical ideas and practices to support these expectations is less well articulated. Federal policies such as *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and state policies like the New York *New Compact for Learning* focus on the resources, conditions, and practices necessary for all students to learn. Lacking in all of these efforts, however, is serious attention to the education profession, that is, how experienced teachers will learn the intended innovations.

What influences teachers to think about and change their pedagogical practices? Some suggest change will come through new subject matter standards proposed by professional organizations (e.g., National Council for the Social Studies), by national groups (e.g., National Center for History in the Schools), or by state education departments (e.g., *Learning Standards for Social Studies* developed by the New York State Department of Education). Others argue that teachers will change their practices in response to organizational restructuring (e.g., smaller class sizes, block scheduling). Still others assert that transforming the classroom lives of teachers and students will depend on changes in state-level assessments (Comfort, 1991). The assumption here is that testing drives much of what teachers do, and so curricular and instructional change will occur if and when state tests change.

This last idea is intriguing for, if true, it suggests the potential for policy implementation on the cheap: Change the test and one changes teachers' practices. Clearly changing state-level tests

is costly. But when compared with the multi-billion dollar price tag some observers believe would be needed to enact meaningful professional development, revising a state testing program is a fiscal bargain.

New York state policymakers seem taken with the tests-change-teaching approach, for although they have developed a new set of curriculum standards (New York State Education Department 1996, 1999b), it is revision of the state testing program which gets most of the attention (Grant, 1997). The scope of that revision is wide. One element is the change from program evaluation tests at the elementary level to high-stakes individual student testing. A second element is the phase-out of the less demanding high school Regents Competency Tests and the requirement that all students take the more demanding Regents exams in Global History (10^{th} grade) and U.S. History (11^{th} grade). And a third piece is a change in the content and format of all state tests to presumably reflect the higher expectations expressed in the state's new standards documents. For this study, we focus on how teachers are responding to changes in the new global history curriculum and the attendant 10^{th} grade Regents examination.

How do teachers make sense of these new state tests and how (if at all) do the tests influence their classroom practices? Strange as it seems, there is little empirical evidence to suggest how teachers, especially teachers at different grade levels, respond to changes in state tests. Assessment is a particularly hot topic in educational circles today, yet there is surprisingly little research which digs deeply into teachers' understandings of the import of standardized tests (Cimbricz, in review; Cohen & Barnes, 1993; Grant, in press-b). Corbett and Wilson's (1991) study of teachers' reactions to a new Maryland testing program is well-known, but it is one of few such studies in a field that is more prone to study students' responses than teachers'.

In this paper, we compare the messages broadcast by the new state curriculum and assessment policies with individual interview data collected from 9th and 10th grade New York state global history teachers. We express the differences between the state's and teachers' views in a set of three tensions: a) major changes v. minor change in teachers' classroom practices; b) more ambitious v. more traditional teaching and learning; and c) clear policy direction v. ambiguity.

The Study

The Teacher Learning and Assessment (TLA) research project is designed to look at the intersection of teachers and assessments. More specifically, we are interested in exploring the relationship between teacher learning and state-level testing. Our study questions include: a) in what ways are tests and test results used in classrooms, schools, and the districts; b) what do the proposed changes in state-level tests mean for teachers and learners; c) how are teachers being prepared to respond to the new state assessments; and d) what challenges do teachers anticipate in moving toward new state assessments? Over the past three years, we have used focus group interviews to investigate if and how these issues differ across school subject matters and grade levels.

The research behind this proposal grew out of the TLA project. Building on an analysis of the focus group data (Grant, 2000a), the lead author of this paper organized a small team of research assistants to do individual interviews with a wider sample of Global History teachers than were interviewed in the focus group sessions. As indicated in Table 1, the purposeful sample we constructed included 16 male and female teachers from a total of 13 schools with various years of teaching experience (novice—1-3 years; experienced—4-14 years; veteran—15-

32 years), teaching locations (rural, suburban, and urban), and grade assignments (Global I/9th grade, Global II/10th grade, or both).[1]

Teacher	Gender	Teaching Experience	School Site	Grade Assignment
1	M	veteran/30 years	urban	9 and 10
2	F	novice/1 year	urban	9 and 10
3	F	novice/1 year	urban	9 only
4	M	veteran/32 years	urban	9 and 10
5	F	experienced/8 years	suburban	9 and 10
6	M	experienced/11 years	suburban	9 and 10
7	M	novice/1 year	suburban	9 and 10
8	F	experienced/7 years	suburban	9 only
9	F	veteran/23 years	suburban	9 and 10
10	F	experienced/6 years	suburban	9 and 10
11	F	novice/1 year	suburban	9 and 10
12	M	novice/1 year	rural	9 and 10
13	M	veteran/23 years	rural	9 and 10
14	M	veteran/34 years	rural	9 and 10
15	M	novice/3 years	rural	10 only
16	F	experienced/4 years	rural	10 only

Table 1: Description of Teacher-Participants

Data collection began with a brief questionnaire that inquired into the teachers' educational backgrounds, their experience teaching generally and the global courses in particular, and their opportunities to learn about changes in the state curriculum and assessment policies. In semi-structured interview protocols, we follow up on these issues and explore the specific influences each policy has had on teachers' content, instruction, and assessment practices and as well as the

[1] Of these several criteria, only teaching experience seems to matter in our analysis. Thus, we distinguish between

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challenges and concerns teachers face. (See Appendix A.) The interviews took approximately 90 minutes each, and were tape-recorded and transcribed.

All data were analyzed inductively from an interpretivist stance (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Erickson, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). That stance highlights the importance of context and the multiple ways individuals construct meaning. All data were also analyzed using a constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glaser, 1978). That method assumes that data collection and analysis are recursive, one informing the other throughout the course of the study. Data from the several interviews were triangulated to cross-check themes and patterns. The over-riding theme was one of tensions between teachers' accounts of their instructional beliefs and practices and their readings of the new global curriculum and test. Our analysis points to three areas of contrast: the tension over the amount of change implied (i.e., fundamental v. minor change); the tension over the direction of the change (i.e., more ambitious v. more traditional instruction); and the tension over the clarity of the state's policies (clear v. ambiguous direction). Before exploring these tensions, however, we offer a brief review of the changes apparent in the new global curriculum and attendant examination.

A New Curriculum, a New Test

Changes in the global curriculum and assessment policies are represented in two forms. One is the *Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum* (New York State Department of Education, 1996, 1999b. See an on-line version of the 1999 Guide at: www.nysed.gov).[7] The 1999 Resource Guide includes front matter that presents a rationale for the new state curriculum,

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the teachers only by their veteran, experienced, or novice status.

[7] The 1996 Resource Guide was draft version circulated both to alert local educators to the possible directions that state curriculum might take and to solicit comments from those educators. The 1999 guide is described as the final version.

a K-12 scope and sequence, and descriptions of several teacher-developed projects that presumably reflect the new standards. In the case of the 9th and 10th grade curriculum, two principal changes are evident. The first is a change in the course title: What was Global Studies is now Global History and Geography. The second change is substantive: The regional and cultural emphasis has been replaced with a chronological approach. The curriculum now features eight units, seven of which highlight an historical theme set within a chronological period.[1] For example, unit three, Global Interactions (1200-1650) includes attention to early Japanese history, the Mongols, global trade, the rise and fall of African civilizations (e.g., Ghana, Mali, Axum), and the Renaissance Reformation, and rise of nation-states in Europe. As in this unit, the remainder of the 27 single-spaced pages reflects a laundry list of fairly predictable world history items running from the ancient world until today. Also included are a series of content-specific questions, instructional suggestions aimed toward teachers, and lists of suggested documents.

Changes in the state assessment policy are represented in the *Regents Examination in Global History and Geography Test Sampler* (New York State Education Department, 1999a). This test "sampler," available to teachers over the state education department website (www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/pub.html#cat6), presents examples of test items, scoring rubrics for the open-ended items, and samples of students' work. The changes exemplified in the sampler over the former global studies test are several. One set of changes concerns the multiple-choice questions. Although it is difficult to discern any fundamental changes in the nature of the multiple-choice questions (Grant, 2000b), where they were once grouped by region (e.g., China, Africa), now they are arranged in chronological order. There are also two more multiple-choice

[1] The eighth unit, Global Connection and Interactions," focuses on a range of issues: migration, technology, status of women and children, ethnic and religious tensions.

questions now (50 rather than 48) compared with the previous tests. Bigger changes are evident in the essay sections of the test. New York students have long written essays on their state exams. In the past, students chose among seven thematic essay prompts to write three essays. On the new exam, students write two essays, one of which is a thematic essay much like those on previous tests. Now, however, students have no choice on which topic to write. The second essay, a Document-Based Question (DBQ) is much different than most students have seen in the past.[4] A DBQ consists of two parts. The first is a series of up to eight primary source documents, such as, quotations, political cartoons, graphs, related to a single topic. Under each of these documents is one or more questions which probe for the main idea of the representation. After completing these "constructed response" questions, students respond to an essay prompt drawing upon the information from the documents and their prior knowledge. Both types of essays, thematic and DBQ, are graded using a state-developed rubric from 0-5 points. In the past, students had to score a 65 in order to pass the exam. Sixty-five is still the passing score, but school districts may set the mark at 55 for up to two years as a transition period. It should also be noted that where the ratio of points between the multiple-choice and essays on the Global Studies exam was 45% to 55%, that ratio is reversed on the new exams.[5]

Talk about higher standards and more ambitious teaching and learning echo throughout the different manifestations of the Social Studies Resource Guide. The authors of these guides do not presume that meeting the ostensibly higher standards and more ambitious teaching and learning advocated will be easy. In fact, they assert that classroom teachers face "a tremendous challenge" (New York State Department of Education, 1996). Nevertheless, the authors

[4] The reason for the qualifier "most" is that the DBQ has been a standard feature of Advanced Placement exams for many years.

[5] Or so the policymakers assert. See Grant (2000b) for an analysis which suggests the essays are actually worth only about a quarter of the grade.

maintain that nothing short of a wholesale change is acceptable. The authors of the Foreword in the 1996 draft state the case plainly: "New York State is engaged in a serious effort to raise standards for students…Classroom teachers…must bring reality to the *teaching and learning* process in order to assure that *all* of their students will perform at higher levels" (p. 5; emphasis in original). Foremost in the "strategy for raising standards" is "setting clear, high expectations/standards for *all* students and developing an effective means of assessing student progress in meeting the standards" (p. 5).[6] In the 1999 version of the guide, teachers are told that they are to develop "rich, engaging, and meaningful social studies programs" (p. 3).

References to higher standards and more ambitious teaching and learning are less obvious in the test sampler. In contrast to the explicit talk about higher standards in the Resource Guide, an introductory letter from the Assistant Commissioner for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment merely asserts that "these test questions will measure student progress toward achieving the State's learning standards in social studies" (New York State Education Department, 1999b, p. iii). Later, in the Introduction, references to the essay tasks on the test suggest the need for more substantive instruction. The authors note that, on the thematic essay, "students are asked to compare and contrast events, analyze issues, or evaluate solutions to problems" (p. 1). Document-based questions, they maintain, "require students to identify and explore multiple perspectives on events or issues by examining, analyzing, and evaluating textual and visual primary and secondary documents" (p. 1). Near the end of the Introduction, the authors suggest that teachers work through the sample student essays and then respond to a series of questions designed "to help teachers plan for instruction" (p. 2). Some of the questions are procedural, such as "to what extent did the students follow the guidelines included with each question type?"

[6] The other two elements of the "strategy" are "building the capacity of schools/districts to enable *all* students to meet standards" and "making public the results of the assessment of student progress through school reports" (p. 5).

The last question, however, recalls the language of more ambitious instruction evident in the Resource Guide: "What opportunities do K-12 students have to engage in a social studies instructional program that includes writing in the content area, using documents of all kinds, and engaging in activities requiring higher-order thinking skills?" (p. 2).

The language of the new global history curriculum and test suggests a related set of directives to teachers. One of those directives implies that teachers need to make fundamental changes in their classroom practices. From the very fact that the state felt compelled to issue a new curriculum and to redesign the ensuing test, to the language professing the state's "serious effort to raise standards for students," the messages broadcast are those which direct teachers to make profound changes in their instruction. A second directive promotes the idea that classroom changes must be in the direction of more ambitious teaching and learning. Citing the need to develop activities that require "higher-order thinking skills" and to develop programs that are "rich, engaging, and meaningful," policymakers suggest that tinkering at the edges of one's practice will not do. Teachers must not only make major changes in their instruction, but those changes must be in directions they presumably have not been headed before. The third directive asserts that the changes teachers need adopt are clearly represented in the state's policies. The curriculum Resource Guide, policymakers state, provides "clarity" for teachers in their local curriculum efforts. Similarly, the test sampler renders "help" for teachers in planning their classroom lessons. Although it appears that teachers are to do some work on their own, these statements presume that teachers should simply follow the state's lead.

Teachers, Tests, and Tensions

Our analysis of the teacher interviews yielded a rich array of ideas. As we looked across those ideas, however, we saw several tensions arise between the presumed direction of the new

state curriculum and assessment policies and the teachers' own interpretations of those policy effects. That teachers may interpret policy differently than policymakers is no particular surprise (see, for example, Grant, 1998). In this case, however, we see numerous tensions where, in effect, teachers disagree with policymakers. This is not to say that teachers are actively resisting state policies (although in some cases they are) for most of the teachers we interviewed seem to accept, if not the direction of the new global curriculum and test, at least the presumption that the state education department has the authority to set such policies. That said, the teachers express a fair degree of frustration, anxiety, and skepticism that the changes proposed in the new curriculum and test offer much that is either new or helpful to them and their students.

The Tension Around Fundamental Changes in Teachers' Practices

Although a policy, like any text, can be multiply interpreted (Cohen & Barnes, 1993; Grant, 1998), the new global history curriculum and test policies strongly imply that teachers need to make fundamental changes in their classroom practices. Our interviews reveal that while all the teachers have made some modifications of their content, instruction, and assessment practices, few assert that these actions represent profound changes.

Curricular Changes

The most visible change teachers report is a move from a cultural view of global events to a chronological view. Few teachers are happy about this move, but virtually all of the teachers we interviewed said that they have adopted the state's directive to teach global "history and geography" rather than global "studies."[1] A couple teachers also report that they are less inclined to teach current events now than under the old curriculum.

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[1] While there are social studies departments which have consciously decided to stay with the Global Studies curriculum, only one teacher in our sample has and she anticipates retooling to a chronological approach in the coming year.

Some of the teachers we interviewed favored the change to global history on first glance. As one experienced teacher said, "I was excited about it when it first came out because teaching the old global curriculum, I always felt that, you know, we teach Africa from the dawn of civilization to the present. And then we move to India. It's sort of like a record on skip."

Any glow from the new curriculum faded rapidly into dissatisfaction for this teacher and all the others in our sample. Three concerns surfaced most strongly. The most commonly expressed concern is the amount of material to cover. Always the bane of social studies teachers, the breadth of content listed in the new curriculum irks all the teachers we interviewed. A veteran teacher said, "I think in general [chronology] is [a better approach], but I still think it's too much material. Especially for the slower student. I don't know what the quick answer is, but that's an awful lot of material to expect from a student." A veteran teacher concurs, "I see this as too broad, as too much, it involves too much carryover. And I just think it's unreasonable to expect a fourteen or fifteen-year-old to do this stuff."

The second concern is fundamental to the chronological approach: Teachers feel it "jumps around" too much. A novice teacher notes, "You're skipping around in different spots, different time periods. There's no continuity." A veteran teacher observes, "It's really, it's difficult because you have to jump around and use your books much differently and use your materials much differently…and that's hard, you've got to jump around and do these things." And an experienced teacher claims, "I think chronological is a tough approach….Kids are not good with dates, they're not good with making connections. And when you're flip-flopping to different regions of the world, you really don't realize that you are talking about the same time period."

The sense that students find confusing the "flip-flopping" across chronological periods echoes loudly across the teacher interviews. With only one or two exceptions, these teachers believe that their students flounder under the chronological approach:

> I didn't want to go that [chronological] route. I didn't think it was the right route to take. I don't think that's how people, much less kids, learn history. This huge, chronological narrative, I don't think it makes any sense to kids....The more I teach it, the more I think about it, the less effective it is. I don't think kids learn history that way. (Novice, teacher)

Few teachers are happy about it, but most are following the state's lead and are revamping their curriculum. That change may not be as profound as it seems on the surface, however, for a close analysis of the interviews suggests that the new curriculum registers less as a fundamental change in teachers' practices than as a retrofitting. This claim is especially true for veteran teachers who taught the regional curriculum. One teacher describes the new curriculum as a shift in emphasis rather than in substance. "It's (the new global curriculum) probably more like rather than different from the previous approach in many ways," he said, "except 10th grade now, we're dealing more with the more recent history than earlier history." Another teacher echoed the point that the new global curriculum represents largely a change in emphasis:

> I don't think it was that big of a deal in the change. I think the curriculum is still basically the same, but you have a different emphasis now. We did more with time-lines and trying to get students to understand that during one period, this was happening in Europe, and this was happening in China, so you had to change things around a little bit, but I think that for the most part it's still the same course, but you have a historical perspective more than a regional perspectives....As far as the curriculum goes, I think it was just a little bit of a change.

Having not taught, or not taught long, under the previous curriculum, less experienced teachers expressed no particular sense of the new curriculum as a profound change in their content decision-making.

More important for less experienced teachers is the new global Regents test. No teacher said that the changes in the state exam were unimportant, but novice teachers were more likely than veterans to cite the test as on profound influence on their taught curriculum. A novice teacher claims pressure to cover content for the test pushes her to treat ideas and events superficially:

> I don't think [students] get any concept of what history really is in the interpretation process of history because we as teachers aren't allowed to back off on that curriculum that we are running breathlessly through, and simply look at a piece of history and how it has variously been interpreted, and then allow kids to come up with some kind of their own interpretation of it. You know? I just feel this sense of breathlessly running through a curriculum never having an opportunity to relax enough to do that, to bring the materials in and work with kids, to take the time to work with kids through those materials. Because clearly it would take lots of time, and if I've got to get through World War II in two weeks, you know, I just don't know how I could do that at this point.

A novice teacher describes an even more specific influence of the test on her content decision-making. After reviewing past Regents exams, she narrowed her focus on some topics and eliminated others:

> I've been studying those tests. So I assessed the percentage of questions for each topic. And that's how I decided what could be eliminated or what could be done on like a worksheet, you know, breeze-over kind of material, and what had to be hard-core time spent on. And

that's like, I eliminated the Aztecs, the Incas, and Mayans; I eliminated Latin America! [And I did so] because I thought, I felt that I've seen about twenty questions on it [over several years], and it's usually one of the choices they give you on the geographic topic for a thematic essay, but [students] don't have to pick that....So I told [the students], out of the things that we had to do, I eliminated this chapter, this section. I feel that your knowledge from seventh grade should carry you through two or three multiple-choice questions.

Asked if there were other areas that she decided to eliminate completely, the teacher replied uneasily, "No, there's areas I didn't spend as much time on, but eliminate completely, no. I did eliminate [the Latin America unit], I know, horrible! To eliminate it completely!"

This teacher is the only one to talk openly about eliminating areas of the curriculum due to the general constraints of time and the particular constraints of the state test. Other teachers, however, noted that they had dramatically cut back on another type of content: current events. Under the Global Studies curriculum, teachers understood that they were to bring the study of each region to the present. A veteran teacher sums up the common expression that teachers are now having trouble bringing in current events to a decidedly history-based curriculum:

> The nice thing about the older global course sequence was that you could constantly deal with issues of news issues and world event issues....And you could present them all of the time, and you could constantly use them as a launching point, an anticipatory set for jumping into so why did they do this in Lebanon today? Here's the article. What do we know about Lebanon that does that? Why are the Iraqis doing this? What's different about Iraqis and Egyptians? You can't do that as much [under the new curriculum].

One might argue that tie-ins to current events will increase as teachers grow more accustomed to the new curriculum. Yet other than in the concluding unit, Global Connections and Interactions,

there is virtually no talk in the guide about linking historical study to contemporary issues. Instead, a decidedly "history for its own sake" sense pervades the curriculum. Given the traditionally weak value students place on historical study (Haladyna & Shaugnessy, 1985) and the expressed need for students to make sense of history in light of their own lives (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Grant, in press-a; Seixas, 1997), ignoring connections to current events seems like a significant oversight. Teachers who persist in making current event connections, therefore, do so in spite of rather than because of the state curriculum and test.

As powerful as these examples of curriculum narrowing seem, our analysis points even more strongly to the idea that teachers do not perceive the content changes they have made as fundamental. Moreover, they do not attribute their decisions exclusively the curriculum or test. A case in point is the novice teacher who "eliminated" Latin America from her course. Later in her interview, she describes how her unit on Egypt and Rome continued to expand well beyond the time she had planned:

> [We spent more time on] Egypt and Rome. The kids get so fascinated, they won't let it go. They just won't let it go! You're trying to move on, and it's, we're going to watch that movie on Egypt again, aren't we? No, we're not! They were fascinated with Egypt, they were fascinated with Rome. And Rome, it just seemed like, I think I got caught up into Rome too.

This quote flies in the face of those who argue that tests drive teaching, for here we have a novice teacher clearly making content decisions based on factors, such as, student and teacher interest rather than on the test itself. Now presumably questions on Egypt and Rome appear on the global test. But this teacher and her class spent weeks on this unit, far exceeding a test-based time frame. We do not deny the influence of the test, but merely point out that factors other than

the test can influence teachers' decisions (Grant, 1996; 1998; McCutcheon, 1981; Romanowski, 1996).

The tension around teachers' curricular decisions. Understanding that factors other than new curriculum and tests influence teachers' content decisions is important for it helps us contextualize their actions. But we should not let the notion of multiple influences hide a basic characteristic of most curriculum documents: They do not help teachers make the hard choices about what degree of emphasis content ideas merit. This seems odd in at least one respect because it appears that the authors of the Resource Guide (New York State Education Department, 1999b) make explicit reference to the "challenge" of content choice. In a section entitled, "Depth v. Breadth," the authors note that "the broad scope of subject matter and the amount of material…is a serious concern for social studies educators" and that "selection of what to study is a major issue in planning instruction" (p. 5). That said, these ideas lie dormant as the authors stop short of any useful advice beyond the need to find "a justifiable balance of depth and breadth" (p. 5).

While this suggestion makes sense, the authors offer little advice about what to emphasize and what to de-emphasize in the scope and sequence. The 27 single-spaced pages of the curriculum guide for Global History and Geography feature a list of *content* (i.e., people, places, and events) and *connections* (i.e., a list of questions and suggestions that teachers might consider in planning their lessons). The content is a fairly predictable list of world history items running from the ancient world until today arranged in outline form. Unfortunately, at no point do the authors indicate how much emphasis to give to one idea over another. Thus the "French Revolution" is listed on a par with "Social, economic, and political impacts of the plague on Eurasia and Africa," and "Ibn Batatu" is listed on par with the "Magna Carta." Understand that

each of these items may well be worth teaching, but the issue of too much content and too little time demands that teachers make difficult choices about what to teach in depth and what to glide over. One might expect a new curriculum, especially one that raises the issue of depth v. breadth, would help teachers make content decisions. This one does not.

A tension surfaces, then, between the presumption that the new global curriculum and test demand fundamental changes in teachers' content decisions and the interview evidence which suggests that the decisions teachers are making hardly qualify as profound. Exhorting teachers to reform their classroom curriculum with general talk about the "tremendous challenge" they face seems to fall flat. That teachers receive no specific assistance from the state education department helps explain why factors other than the state policies influence their content decisions, and why they might conclude generally that the content they teach is little changed.

Instructional Changes

We see similar patterns of influence and change when we examine teachers' talk about their instruction: Teachers typically cite the new global test as more influential than the curriculum on their instructional decision-making, but overall the changes teachers make seem neither wide-ranging nor profound. Teachers are teaching in some ways that are consistent with the new curriculum and test, but their instructional choices more strongly reflect either their past practice, their own sense of what is important, or both.

As with their content decision-making, some teachers find themselves narrowing their instructional repertoires as a result of the new global curriculum. Perceiving "too much content," a couple of teachers said that they are reducing the number and scope of the student projects, especially research projects, they typically assign. Debates take lots of class time to prepare for and stage; research projects demand that teachers develop longer units of study in order for

students to complete their work. Time, as these teachers remind us, is always precious, and so while no teacher said that she or he suspended all student projects, a number support the words of a veteran teacher who describes how he has cut back on these instructional activities:

> We did do a group project on religions, the last two years, but it's not the in-depth thing that we used to do in the old Global Studies. And we used to have a lot of fun with it. But with the curriculum the way it is at this point, I haven't been able to make enough time to get that back in there [as deeply].

We also heard a couple of teachers say that they use textbooks and lecture methods more than they have in the past. A veteran teacher explains that time and content pressures convince him that he "needs to go to the textbook more":

> I'm about to finish a unit with India, and I've gone more to textbook than I normally would. The same is true of the Middle East and we're about to do it with respect to China and South America. And the reason that I'm doing it is I think when you're starting a subject, it's sort of necessary. But I also feel that we're so short on time right now. I have no other choice. I don't prefer to it that way, but I've been having to do it that way. I normally use the textbook only within limits. But the new curriculum, where it's new material, I've felt I need to go to the textbook more.

An experienced teacher echoes the claim that she is using her textbook more under the new curriculum. "It's been strictly a textbook approach," she said, "section one, section two, section three, test after section three. Very stringent note-taking, note-taking from the book, outlining, really everything this year, it's been very different for [students]."

Taking the place of student projects, or squeezed into an already bulging instructional day are test-related activities. Most teachers cite the DBQ as the biggest change in the exam. Not

surprisingly, then, virtually all the teachers report spending more class time introducing historical documents and teaching students how to write DBQs.

While all the teachers talked about using primary source documents as a regular part of their instruction, only about half noted this as a change in their practice. Most report using documents in the past and so have not changed their instruction due to either the curriculum or the test. A veteran teacher admits that he is more conscious about using primary sources now, but avers that this represents no particular change:

> I always did the primary source readings. I always did the maps and almost like constructed responses in the past. But I think I'm more conscious of them now. I want those always to be there. So maybe that's the change. It's just that I'm more conscious of it now because of the test.

While the use of documents represents a minor change at best, the teaching of test-taking skills appears to be a major change in teachers' instructional practices. Most all acknowledge that they not only spend more class time practicing DBQs, but that they also directly teach skills they believe students need to perform well. A sample of their comments highlights the importance of teaching and practicing test-taking skills:

> I feel a pressure to drill certain kids on methods of passing a test. And they are the kids who are struggling, who I fear will not pass the exam, and so myself and the other teachers I work with have decided that the best way to get them through it is to drill them in those skills that the exam will require to pass. The writing skills, the answering questions skills. (Novice, teacher)

To me there's more of a pressure now to get the kids to pass the Regents. And I think that has impacted me even though I don't want it to. It has. It's more test-driven, do the kids know this well enough to perform on a test? So I think we've done a lot more testing. (Veteran, teacher)

[I] focus a lot more on getting them to take tests better, to be better test-takers. Because a lot of them have reading and writing difficulties. Right now when they get a test back, I try to do the technique where you highlight the question, just the main words that you need, and then don't look at the answers, try to answer it yourself. And then find the right answer. We try to do like a how to attack the question. (Experienced, teacher)

What I'm finding with these DBQs and with the thematic essays [is that students] are so nervous about them, they are making the essays harder than they actually need to be. So what I've been doing with them is breaking them down into parts: "Here's what it's asking, here are just one or two word responses in answer to that aspect of the task or the question. It was very simple to do it that way now just take these responses and put it into complete sentences, into paragraphs and you got the essay." (Experienced, teacher)

With a new, and presumably higher-stakes test, it makes sense that teachers would give over some of their instructional time to test-taking activities. What surprises us, however, is that teachers seem to be doing so in addition to, rather than in place of, their regularly scheduled instructional activities. Teachers are narrowing some of their instructional choices, but over and over, they told us that they continue to do most of the activities they have done in the past. A veteran teacher still does an inquiry activity where he gives students bags of artifacts "found"

near a local landmark and asks them to "construct who was this person?" A novice teacher describes the importance of drawing as a tool for understanding. "I think if you put a box of crayons in front of somebody, I don't care how old they are," she said, "they are going to have a good time. So we do a lot of drawing of historical concepts." An experienced teacher explains that she has always stressed the importance of historical patterns:

> I guess it wouldn't be a change because I've always thought it was important but I think that for the thematic essay, I think that I do something I always did. Matter of fact, I know I do something I always did was to show how really history does repeat itself. And we're looking at various civilizations and they rise and they fall. And a lot of times they rise for the same reasons and they fall for the same reasons.

Finally, a veteran teacher adds: "[The test] forced me to condense things a little bit more, but in general, this is not as big a change for me as for some people. Because in the 70s I used the discovery method, the inquiry method so I'm more comfortable than I might have been."

The tension around teachers' instructional decisions. As with the impact of state policies on teachers' content decision-making, teachers' instructional planning seems less than profoundly changed as a result of the new global curriculum and test. No teacher describes anything like a major transformation in her or his teaching. Instead, most talked about the changes they have made as additions to their established practices. Even novice teachers give little indication that their ideas about teaching and learning have been radically influenced by the state's actions. Teachers are doing some different things now, but they imply that those differences are more in the nature of adjustments than of wholesale change.

One reason for this finding is that the state policies provide as little specific guidance on how to change one's teaching as it does on choosing content. Some of the "Teacher's Note"

entries in the Resource Guide (New York State Education Department, 1999b) do make specific pedagogical suggestions, but they either tend to be common sense (e.g., "Have students develop timelines and maps to illustrate the parallel development of classical civilizations") or to be only vaguely directive (e.g., "Students should be able to trace the rise and evolution of capitalism as an economic system. They should understand that capitalism was made possible by changes within the European economic system and by overseas expansion."). With these rather pallid suggestions, it is no particular surprise that teachers do not see them as importantly influential on their teaching.

By contrast, rhetoric attached to the test sampler does seem more directly represented in teachers' practices. At the end of the Introduction, teachers are told that "test-taking strategies can be taught; students who have been trained in these skills are likely to score better" (p. 2). Given that all of the teachers we interviewed have increased their classroom attention to test-taking strategies, one could conclude that the sampler has directly influenced teachers' instruction. But acknowledging that claim is different than accepting the notion that teachers have fundamentally changed their teaching. The Regents exam's long history means that teachers have always taught test-taking strategies. These teachers are conducting more focused instruction around DBQs, but we detect no profound change in their teaching as a result of this action. In short, while teachers have added more test-related activity to their classroom day, the depth of that activity is suspect.

A tension exists, then, between state-level assumptions about the need for fundamental changes in teachers' pedagogy and the accommodating approach most teachers seem to be employing. Again, the question is not whether or not any changes are occurring, but instead, it is

the depth of those changes that matters. And as with teachers' content decisions, the impact of the new global curriculum and test seems less powerful than the state policies project.

Assessment Changes

While the teachers we interviewed cite the new state test as an influence on their assessment practices; not a single teacher mentioned the new curriculum in that light. As noted above, specific language in the test sampler (New York State Education Department, 1999a) advises teachers to "train" students in test-taking strategies. It also advises teachers that "students need multiple opportunities to write thematic essays and answer document-based questions" (p. 2). Teachers are responding to this call; all the teachers we interviewed said that they provide more opportunities for students to practice writing test-like essays. Again, however, the question of whether this ranks as a fundamental change arises because all but the first year teachers acknowledge that they have always posed Regents-like questions. Moreover, only one teacher said that he was doing more end-of-the-year test review than in years past. We conclude, then, that the new state policies fall short of deeply influencing teachers' assessment practices.

A few teachers include more state test-like questions on their in-class assessments. For example, a veteran teacher explains that, while he has always included some Regents-type questions, "I seem to use them more than ever now. I've tried to use at least some DBQ questions for every single test." Some teachers are also increasing the amount of testing they do. Another veteran teacher notes, for example, "I think we've done a lot more testing. I think we've done a lot more instead of project things we're doing more essays like DBQs and thematic essays, and again, the bottom line is the test."

Most teachers report using Regents-like questions on their tests in the past, so while DBQ questions surface more frequently, teachers have not made fundamental changes in their

assessment practices. "All of my tests are Regents based. So all of my tests, ever since 9th grade have always been Regents," said a veteran teacher.

The tension around teachers' assessment decisions. The new global history tests matter to teachers, but they seem to matter in less powerful ways than state policymakers may intend. These teachers have always taken the state tests seriously, and they still do. Most view the addition of the DBQ as the principal change in the exam, and they have responded by including more opportunities for their students to practice on this kind of question. But again, does this change rank as fundamental? We do not believe so.

One reason for this finding may be that the authors of the global curriculum and test say nothing about teachers' in-class assessments. They offer little help to teachers in making content and instructional decisions; they do not even mention the regular assessments teachers develop throughout the school year. Little surprise, then, that teachers rely on their past modes of assessment, which emphasize traditional objective and essay tests.

The tension described between the state messages about content and instruction and the teachers' practices seems less applicable here: These teachers use the state question format as a guideline for their own curricular assessments. That they have not made fundamental changes is a reflection of the fact that they already embrace the importance of the state exam.

The Tension Around More Ambitious Teaching and Learning

If state policymakers seem to be exhorting teachers to make fundamental changes in their pedagogies, they also seem to be suggesting that the nature of those changes should be in more ambitious directions. For example, under the heading "Intellectual Skills," teachers are told that students should "consult and interpret databases and a wide variety of primary sources" and should have "many opportunities for research activities" including conducting research

inquiries" (New York State Department of Education, 1999b, p. 4). In a section entitled, "Multiple Learning Environments and Resources," teachers are advised to create "learning environments [which] include databases, information-retrieval systems, and other library and museum resources throughout the world" (p. 6). And under the category of "Student-Centered Teaching, Learning, and Assessment," teachers are instructed that:

> In addition to the more traditional learning tasks, activities should include independent reading on and investigation of topics identified by the teacher and by the student, performances that require in-depth understanding, complex questioning and thinking, and opportunities to present conclusions in new ways. Many assessment tasks should be embedded in learning activities to mesh instruction and monitoring students' progress toward the attainment of learning goals. (p. 7)

In these several ways, state policymakers imply that teachers should plan and enact richer and more engaging forms of teaching and learning akin to that recommended in national reform proposals such as the *National Standards for History* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996).

In the face of such exhortations to raise standards and to develop more powerful teaching and learning, teachers report feeling pushed in different directions. Some tell us that they feel pushed toward more traditional teaching practices such as textbook reading and lecturing. At the same time, teachers feel directed toward teaching in powerful ways. What complicates this matter, however, is that when teachers describe the ambitious teaching they do, they suggest that it occurs because they always have employed these practices, or they cite another factor that is more influential than the state policies.

A mini-case the kind of pressure teachers report is instructive. Paula is a teacher with three years of experience. By philosophy and background, she believes in promoting an active, engaging, and substantive pedagogy reflecting many of the tenets of the "teaching for understanding" (Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993). Those views clash, in Paula's mind, with the directions she perceives the state curriculum and test promoting. In fact, she mocks the state rhetoric of higher standards and more ambitious teaching and learning. Asked what she has heard about the rationale for the new curriculum, she responds, "I think the answer as I recall has usually been something like we need to raise the bar so that kids are doing critical thinking, blah, blah, blah." Asked about the rationale for the new test, she responds in kind, "I think that their (the State Education Department's) rationale is that we have to raise the bar and make it more of a critical thinking assessment. That's their rationale that I've heard." Scoffing at these rationales, Paula asserts that the implicit message is two-fold: "The message that I got, and this was not explicit, was that the objective was to get these kids to pass this test and that the state education people were using the test to change teaching." Asked why the state might pursue new curriculum and tests to effect these ends, she explains, "because they felt that nothing else had worked, and maybe if we make this new, more high stakes test at the end, maybe teachers will pay attention to us."

Paula interprets the state's efforts as squarely at odds with her own sense of powerful teaching and learning. The frustration she expresses toward the new curriculum, for example, reflects much of the rhetoric national reformers (e.g., Bradley Commission, 1989) have called for:

> I think the curriculum should have gone in a very different direction, and maybe even if they wanted to change it from the more social science approach I would have liked to have seen it

> go to some kind of thematic approach where history, great themes of history, and teachers would be free to pick out examples of those themes and teach those themes, not necessarily in chronological order....That seems to me more how history really is written, how historians write, and it seems more meaningful to me certainly. And I think to kids as well.

An expression this strong might lead one to conclude that Paula can confidently put aside the state efforts in favor of her own more ambitious inclinations. Paula quickly complicates that impression. "Generally I think it's forced me to teach history in a way that I'm philosophically at odds with," she said, "in a way that I don't think kids are going to remember or care about and I feel obligated to do that because of this test at the end." Paula feels pushed or "forced" to teach history in traditional, focus-on-coverage ways:

> I just feel this sense of breathlessly running through a curriculum, never having an opportunity to relax enough to do that. To bring the materials (primary source documents) in and work with kids, take the time to work with kids through those materials. Because clearly it would take lots of time, and if I've got to get through World War II in two weeks, you know, I just don't know how to, how I could do that at this point.

Beyond racing through the curriculum, Paula feels a need to direct a portion of class time to instruction in test-taking skills, especially for lower ability students. "I feel a pressure to drill certain kids on methods of passing a test," she said.

From the angle represented above, one now might perceive Paula as captive to the state policies. Her content, instruction, and assessment decisions seem to reflect a preoccupation with the new curriculum and test such that her beliefs about more ambitious instruction lie fallow. One might protest that Paula's response is an over-reaction to or a mis-reading of the policymakers' intent. After all, the rhetoric of the Resource Guide seems to support the kind of

pedagogy Paula espouses. Why does she seem to presume that her more ambitious inclinations would be ineffectual?

Part of the answer lies in Paula's relative inexperience. She is, this year, now a tenured teacher. That said, she still considers herself to be something of a novice, both curious and uncertain about her developing instructional practice. She believes strongly that students need provocative and substantial experiences if they are to become thoughtful learners, but she does not know if such instructional activities will, by themselves, prepare her students to do well on the state test. So she finds herself in the awkward position of having to trust what she believes the state is telling her to do, namely emphasis the coverage of content and test-taking skills, until she knows otherwise. "I don't even know what [the test's] going to look like. So I'm going to take their word that this is going to work, I'm getting them through the exam and, you know, do what I am supposed to, what they think I'm supposed to be doing."

Another part of the explanation for Paula's seeming capitulation to traditional practices is that it only explains part of her practice. For, in effect, Paula has created two teaching practices. One is explicitly curriculum and test-directed; the other is explicitly self-directed. Consider Paula's use of primary source documents as a case in point. "I use [documents] the way I thought I would use them. I think, well, I use them the way I would like to use them sometimes, and I use them the way I think the state would like me to use them sometimes." Asked if that means that these are different uses, Paula quickly assents:

> And those are different. The way I use documents is for kids to make interpretations of them, of the documents, based on their knowledge of the topic. And that means that there may be a very wide variety of answers to whatever the question is. When I use them how I think the state wants to use them, there is probably not a wide variety of answers to the

question. There's probably a pretty specific answer to the question that goes with the document that I'm presenting to them.

I'm not sure I've ever used the same document two different ways....I used a political cartoon which showed a Red Army soldier helping a peasant plow a field. And the caption underneath it was, "How can I ever repay you?" And it wasn't clear who was saying it to whom. As I looked at it, I realized it could have gone either way. So that was the question I asked: If the peasant was asking the soldier, what was the response? If the soldier was asking the peasant, what would the response be? But I think if I were to use that same document for a DBQ essay, I would make it clear who was speaking to whom, and ask maybe a more direct, explicit question, like what kinds of, I'm not even quite sure what I would ask. But it would be a different kind of question, and it would not be as ambiguous to what was going on in the cartoon. I would not allow for that kind of ambiguity in the document.

I think when I'm doing it for the way I'd like to do it, I have an idea of the response I'm looking for, but if [the students] come up with something that was different from what I was expecting, but it made sense and they could back up with some reasoning, then that's acceptable. But if I were using it for the state test-taking skill thing, then there would be one response, and if they didn't get that, then it would be wrong.

Think about the tension this teacher feels. On the one hand, Paula is using documents, like the Red Army cartoon, which push her students to think about the context of the situation, to bring in their prior knowledge, and to articulate both an argument and the evidence for that argument. This is precisely the kind of learning observers describe as powerful instruction (Wineburg & Wilson, 1991). At the same time, Paula feels compelled to bring in documents that support a

limited, often literal, condition from which students presumably can draw the right "state test-taking skill thing." Rather than craft an instructional plan that coherently and consistently promotes ambitious teaching and learning, Paula constructs a precarious mix of the rich and the lame, the engaging and the pedantic. The latter of these pairs she does because she is not sure that she can afford not to; the former she does because she feels compelled to offer her students more than a superficial treatment of the subject matter. But note: Paula's ambitious teaching comes in spite of rather than because of the change in state policies. We can not be sure how Paula would teach if unfettered by new curricula and tests, but at the very least she would not have to juggle two sets of books.

Like Paula, other teachers we interviewed teach in ambitious ways. And like her, they attribute those actions to forces other than the state policies. For example, recall the veteran teacher who has long used an inquiry method of teaching. Seeing the power of teaching what he calls the "whys and hows" leads him to feel confident that he can continue to do so even when presented an ostensibly different curriculum and test:

> I think since I used the inquiry method before, I've stuck pretty much with it....So I don't think I had to too make the adjustment that a lot of people had to. Because I was very used to the [inquiry] methods, and I've also learned...that you deal with the whys and the hows instead of the what, where, and when.

This teacher is one who said he is using his textbook a bit more this year than in the past, but he does so within a pedagogy directed toward powerful student learning.

A second example of a teacher pursuing ambitious classroom goals does so under the influence of a new textbook. This teacher, a veteran of some 30 years, acknowledges ratcheting up his teaching due largely to a new textbook. The authors of that book, *World History:*

Patterns of Civilization (McDougal, Littel), present history through an analytic framework which emphasizes five concepts: cities, specialized workers, complex institutions, record-keeping, advanced technology. This framework, the teacher asserts, encourages students to both see cultures broadly and in detail and to look across cultures for similarities and differences:

> Now when we teach thematically…it doesn't make a difference what civilization you're talking about, you look for the five concepts.…So I'll assign, okay, this group is going to do the Babylonians, this group is going to do the Sumerians, this group is going to do the Egyptians. Then you can present and show, what are we looking for. We're looking for the similarities and differences.

He continues, "As a teacher, you think about it, how do I make this understandable for my students? And the way they've got this now, it is." As a teacher who admittedly once focused on "fun" activities, the introduction of a framework for understanding and comparing cultures represents a potentially deep change in his instructional practice. Note, however, that this change stems from a new textbook rather than either the new global curriculum or the new Regents exam.

The tension around ambitious teaching and learning. Most of the teachers we interviewed are doing innovative things, but not a single one attributed their actions to the new state policies. A tension exists, then, between the state's presumed impetus toward more ambitious teaching and the teachers' interpretation which suggests that state policies promote more traditional instruction.

One reason this tension might exist is that there seems to be a tension inherent in the state policies themselves. In effect, the curriculum and test can be read to support both more ambitious *and* more conventional teaching.

The front matter of the Resource Guide (New York State Education Department, 199x) best represents the call to more innovative teaching. Recall that the authors insist that teachers develop "rich, engaging, and meaningful social studies programs" (p. 3). While decrying instruction that "presents people and events in isolation, without context" (p. 4), the authors assert that teachers construct pedagogies that "lead to instruction that provides a rich context of the subject and increasing intellectual proficiency" (p. 4).

That said, the authors of the curriculum guide only rarely carry through. Instead of reading coherent and thoughtful directions to effect powerful teaching and learning, teachers see only long lists of traditional content topics and conventional pedagogical suggestions. As noted earlier, teachers receive no assistance in dealing with an overwhelming array of people, places, and events. Instead, they are told by the authors of the test sampler to "pay close attention to the content column" (New York State Education Department, 199x, p. 1).

Teachers interested in ratcheting up their instruction get no more help in the "Teacher Notes" section of the Resource Guide. For there, the model questions posed rarely rise about knowledge-level tasks. Most ask only for definitions or illustrations, such as these examples: "What was the Mandate from Heaven?" "What holy books or texts are associated with the major religions of the world?" "What was the status of women under Islamic law?" Some questions, such as "How did traditional art reflect the beliefs of African kingdoms," call for more elaborate answers, but not necessarily for more sophisticated thinking. To be fair, a few questions do encourage higher levels of thinking, typically calling for comparisons—e.g., "How did Suleiman I compare to other absolute rulers?" and "What reactions against revolutionary ideas occurred in Europe, Russia, and Latin America?" Rarer still are questions which call for teachers to promote

analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of ideas and events. A question like "How successful was [the Mexican] Revolution?" is exceedingly scarce.

In the end, then, teachers may interpret the state policies in any number of ways. Those who are already inclined toward ambitious teaching and learning may read the policies as support to continue. Teachers inclined more toward a content coverage approach to teaching may focus differently, drawing the implication that they should continue to their practice. That a policy might result in confirming diametrically opposed practices, while seemingly nonsensical, is actually pretty standard (Grant, 1998; Kingdon, 1984). What seems most interesting from the angle of powerful teaching and learning, however, is the effect we observe in Paula's situation. Here, a new teacher with ambitious tendencies reads the new curriculum and test as supporting traditional practices and so she constructs a parallel pedagogy, one that attempts to satisfy both impulses. As a conscientious teacher, she lives the tension between encouraging her students' brightest efforts *and* attending to the presumed dictates of the state policies.

The Tension Around the Clarity of the State Policy

The recent state reforms in curriculum and assessment suggest that the changes that have been implemented are necessary and beneficial in order to improve both student learning and teacher instruction. The messages implicit in these documents suggest that fundamental changes in teaching and assessment are necessary in order for students to achieve "higher standards." If the state is calling on teachers to revamp teaching practices, and create activities that require "higher-order thinking skills," the implication is that teachers have not done so in the past. Furthermore, the apparent need for a new curriculum and a new assessment suggests that teachers' past practices were not producing higher standards. While most teachers accept the state's authority, many question the rationale behind the current reforms, professing uncertainty

about the warrant for such changes in state curriculum and assessment policies. Because teachers are unsure of the state's reasoning, or of the state's goals (apart from higher standards), they are unsure how they should go about implementing the changes being asked of them. This confusion among teachers is not surprising, given the vague, non-specific language of the curriculum documents, and the mixed messages inherent in both the resource guide and the new assessments.

Teachers' Confusion Around Changes in Curriculum

The foreword to the 1996 Resource Guide states that the purpose of the guide is to "provide some clarity…which can serve to inform local curriculum development"(p.5). While this guide does provide teachers and districts with a lengthy list of topics, arranged in chronological order, it does not offer them much clarity as to the rationale behind the curriculum changes. When teachers were asked why they thought the state had made the switch from a regional approach to a chronological one, answers ranged from a simple "I don't know" to a far more cynical view of state policy decisions. "I'm guessing, like most state programs, somebody wrote a book about something and got a great idea and decided, well this is the way to do it," offered a veteran teacher. Another veteran teacher in the same district tells us, "somebody needed to reinvent the wheel." An experienced teacher reiterates the concerns of many other teachers when she wonders whether the changes in the curriculum are simply an example of change for the sake of change: "I really think the only reason they changed the curriculum was because around 1996 somebody at the board said, 'Huh, the year 2000 is rolling around, we have to make a change.'"

While unsure about the state's rationale, like the teacher just above, most offer personal theories as to why the changes were enacted. A novice teacher mulls possible explanations: "I'm thinking maybe they felt like the material, the way they were doing it before, because it was

what regional-wise? That maybe the kids were confused they thought. They thought is was more confusing that way?" Pressed as to whether or not she has heard anyone offer a specific reason, she replies, "No. Not at any department meetings, no one really talks about it; they're just talking about what we can do now. No one really mentions why it was changed. I don't even know if they know. I don't know if anyone knows." Another new teacher at a high school offers his guess: "I think standard-wise, it gives New York State an opportunity to promote that they are one of the best educated systems in the country, state-wide. It gives them something to fall back on, to say that they are number one."

It should be noted that not all teachers interviewed reacted negatively to the state's lack of rationale for the curriculum changes. In respect to the curriculum, one veteran teacher believes that the state is "trying to make it more practical....They have arranged it so you can relate the world better than before." In referring to how the state made the decision to change the curriculum, an experienced teacher suggests: "They looked at it, analyzed it, and decided that teaching it chronologically made more sense that teaching it regionally. Makes it easier."

Absent a clear state-offered rationale for the curriculum changes, teachers come up with their own answers. While some teachers evince no particular concern, others are clearly frustrated by what one teacher refers to as the "guessing game." Such frustration is apparent in the account offered by an experienced teacher who describes the climate of confusion brought about by the state's decision to change the global curriculum:

> [There seems among teacher] concerns and wondering why they are changing when things seemed to be going fairly well. We weren't complaining....Teachers seemed happy, students were happy as they could be with Social Studies, [so why did Albany decide] to change. Were they changing out of complaints from parents? We really didn't know why

the change was occurring. But everybody seemed to like the regional approach in the old curriculum, it was serving people.

The novice teacher, who referred to the state's lack of direction and explanation as "the guessing game," asks a host of other questions:

> What's important here? Do they want us to get a cultural understanding? Or is there some historical relevance? Where is the connection here? And I don't know if they put a lot of those early civilizations in just so students get an idea when they get into more developed civilizations....I'm not sure, they're not clear on why they are important. And what do they want the kids to get out of it?

The questions posed by this teacher are not atypical. Most global teachers report feeling overwhelmed by content decisions, and most hope that they are making the right choices for their students. The problem is compounded by the fact that the Resource Guide fails to offer teachers much "clarity" at all. This lack of clarity on the state's part concerning the focus and motivation for recent reforms seems only to frustrate teachers. Simply put, teachers are just not clear about what the state wants from them, and from the new curriculum. A veteran teacher in a district, feeling frustrated by the new curriculum, questions the state's purpose in developing it:

> I think the state needs to look more at what's the goal? What is the goal of Global Studies? I suppose they have, but I don't know. I don't know if the goal's been thought about in relationship to young people and how people learn and what's valid for learning. I find it a frustrating course to teach.

In some cases frustration translates into skepticism about how the state education department arrives at policy decisions. A novice teacher wonders whether a coherent rationale exists:

I don't think anybody has a clear answer on why they changed the curriculum, or why they changed the test. I've never been able to get a clear answer. I've never heard a clear answer. I've never seen one in writing because I don't think they have one. Or at least one they are willing to admit to me, or to teachers.

Teacher's Confusion Around Changes in Assessment

Teacher's confusion about the new global assessment is perhaps even more complex and involved than their confusion regarding the state curriculum changes. Teachers see ambiguity on at least three different levels related to the new tests. First, teachers are uncertain as to what they should expect from these tests, and many cite the lack of information from the state as further exasperating them. Second, teachers note that the new assessment does not seem to adequately reflect the state's encouragement of activities that foster "higher-order thinking" and "rich, engaging and meaningful social studies programs." Moreover, teachers express uncertainty as to why the tests were changed in the first place. And finally, teachers are frustrated and even skeptical in noting that amid all of the state's talk about "higher standards for students," practice grading sessions of essays, particularly the DBQs, reveal that teachers seem to have higher standards for student achievement than the state does.

The teachers involved in our study were interviewed between April and June of the 1999-2000 school year. Many were already thinking ahead to the June Regents exam with a curious mix of indifference, frustration and in some cases, even dread. As a novice teacher states: "I want it over! I think that's what it is, I just want it over. This anxiety over what's going to be on it, and who's going to pass. I just want it over." A novice teacher refers to the test as a "sword hanging over my head." Almost all of the teachers seemed concerned with the coming exam, although not all were as anxious as these newer teachers.

One source of frustration among most of the teachers, involves a perceived lack of information from the state regarding the test, its format, and the specific grading procedures that would accompany it. One experienced teacher shares his uncertainty: "I am still unsure in terms of what the exam's going to look like, are the questions going to be tougher, are they going to be easier, are they still stressing geography, are they still stressing important people? We really don't know."

Despite the fact that all teachers received the test sampler, many share these concerns. An experienced teacher supports the concerns of several teachers when she explains, "we still don't know what the final thing is going to look like. We really don't know, if the kids get a low score on part one, can they still make that up if they are a good writer? Or vice versa?" A veteran teacher expresses his nervousness and uncertainty that resulting from the lack of information about the test:

> Most of the apprehension is because it is new and we all don't know exactly what it is like. I mean, I don't think I've seen at any of the conferences that negative of an atmosphere, but I think there is apprehension. And I feel it too. You just don't know exactly know what the Regents is going to look like. And it's scary because it's new.

The uncertainty and confusion stemming from the new tests is probably not unusual given the fact that any change is likely to cause some apprehension. However, this theme that echoes through many teachers' testimonies is surprising since most of these teachers do not view the changes in the new tests as all that revolutionary. In fact, many of these teachers feel that the changes in the assessment are minor, and do not necessarily reflect the state's goals of higher standards and critical thinking. A veteran teacher acknowledges that her uncertainty persists, despite her sense that the test does not seem radically changed:

> The frustrating part is that we haven't had much actual information from the state in terms of testing, we're really not sure exactly what this test is going to look like....We really had a prototype that showed us what was coming...how it was going to look. It almost seemed like it won't be that drastically different than the old global test, particularly for the multiple-choice.

An experienced teacher argues that the continued presence of multiple-choice questions undercuts the movement toward higher standards:

> A test with [50] multiple-choice questions which are very factually based, but could encompass anywhere in the world from any point in time, you still have to spend a great deal of time imparting facts, and the kids have to memorize them....That's why I don't think the global test is going to change that much. Because they are still going with their old 50 little factual questions.

The continued emphasis on multiple-choice questions seems at odds with the state's desire to assess students' progress in achieving higher standards, particularly if those standards involve the importance of higher-order thinking skills. Many teachers seem hopeful that the new Document Based Questions, which require students to analyze and synthesize information taken from a variety of primary sources, will better reflect the drive towards higher standards. When asked why they thought the state added DBQs on the new exams, several teachers refer to the state's attempt to measure higher-order thinking skills. An experienced teacher cites the potential, and the mixed value of DBQs, when she explains, "[the state] had the right idea as far as standards, it's a higher level of thinking for the students to be able to analyze something." Not all students will be able to do so, she asserts, but she applauds the effort to push "the kid who can take it to the next level and actually interpret and put in his own ideas and draw on his own

knowledge." A novice teacher maintains that the DBQs encourage students to think more like historians. And a veteran teacher thinks that DBQs are beneficial because they "cause kids to think a little bit…you are forced into drawing conclusions based on fact."

While several teachers extol the state's inclusion of the DBQs on the new assessments, others doubt that these new types of essays really measure more ambitious learning and thinking. Asked whether the DBQs assess higher learning, a novice teacher seems unsure: "They require, I think, vocabulary…good reading skills, comprehension skills. I don't know how much higher learning. I think my kids doing their presentations shows more higher learning than anything they could show me on an exam." An experienced teacher asserts that although the DBQs represent a change, they do not necessarily require higher-level thinking:

> That's going to be something that they're probably going to struggle with. It's going to be easier than we originally thought, because we originally thought they were going to get the documents and have to interpret them in the essay. But now they are going to get points for answering the questions about the documents, and then they get to put the documents into the essay.

Most teachers have attended workshops and training sessions dealing with the criteria and methodology for grading the new assessments. They report spending most of the time at these workshops grading practice essays, with a particular focus on the DBQs. Asked about these scoring sessions, nearly every teacher reports being surprised at the leniency of the state's grading criteria for the DBQs:

> We attended this workshop back in March…I know virtually everybody in my department through the whole year has been sweating bullets about how to evaluate these essays….When we got to this workshop with BOCES, they handed us a stack of essays the

state had already corrected according to the rubric. They wanted us to read them and then evaluate them based on what we read. The scoring was 0-5, 5 being the exemplar. It was very interesting, because my group consistently would give an essay a 1 or 2, and the state was giving 4s. So we sat back and weren't sure if we were to be relieved or say "are we actually raising the quality of education? Is this assessment actually showing improvement?"(Experienced teacher)

Similarly, a novice teachers describes his reaction to the state's lowered expectations of student performance:

> In each case I was at least one point lower [on the essay score] than what New York State came up with, and if I, I hate to say this worked out every time, if I added one point on to what I came up with, I was pretty darn close to what they were looking for. So I graded them tougher than New York State was looking for....I would add, let's say I came up with a three, which would be about average, close to an average paper, I would bump it up and give it a four....New York State was looking at it in a more lenient way than I was.

These teachers' accounts of the state's low grading criteria, echo throughout nearly all of the interviews. A veteran teacher asserts that the state criteria represent a dumbing down of standards: "I think as the workshop went on everybody that participated could see that what the state wanted and we basically thought it was rather dumbed down, they were looking for much simpler answer than what we thought should be there." Another experienced teacher describes the state's grading system as being "relatively open and vague....They were going to allow for a lot more points, and we were being too tough on the kids." And a third teacher sums up his experience at the practice scoring session this way: "Generally, for the most part we scored papers lower than what the state had. I think typically we would say it's a three and the state

would give it a four." These teachers report leaving the scoring sessions variously confused, relieved, and skeptical about what they perceive of as the mixed messages about higher standards and more stringent grading procedures.

The tension around teachers' views of the state policies. Global history teachers face a barrage of mixed messages concerning the current reforms in the new curriculum and assessment. One set of messages deals with the perceived need for a new curriculum. The fact that the state created a new curriculum, one that presents historical events in a chronological rather than regional format, suggests that the previous curriculum was in some way flawed. The move to a chronological format, indicates that the state believes students will learn history better in such a manner. Yet, failing to offer an adequate rationale for making the curricular change, state policymakers leave teachers to devise their own theories for the change. At the same time, teachers confront the ever-present problem of how to deal with an overwhelming amount of content in a limited amount of time. Because the state fails to provide practical advice on how to implement this vast curriculum, teachers are again left to their own devices. While many teachers attempt to follow the state's directive to create more "rich, engaging, and meaningful" activities, many wonder how the state wants them to do this. As the state documents talk vaguely about raising the standards, they do not specifically identify the problems with curriculum, instruction, and assessment that they are attempting to solve. Since teachers are confused as to what these elusive problems are, they are at a loss for how to go about helping to solve them.

Yet another set of mixed messages center around the new assessment. Presumably, the state felt that a new assessment was in order to measure higher standards in teaching and learning. The implication of this is two-fold. The need for a new assessment suggests that the old

assessment was not as accurate in testing student knowledge, and perhaps was not as challenging as a new test. But one might also infer that the new test is designed to more accurately assess the specific goals of the new curriculum. With vague curricular goals, however, we can only guess that the new test will measure more ambitious teaching and learning. That guess may be suspect, though, as this goal may be at odds with the new assessment. Multiple-choice questions dominate the new test and, as uncovered in the practice grading of the DBQs, the state's standards seem to be lower than most teachers'. While several of the teachers question whether or not the new test measures higher standards and higher-level thinking skills, a novice teacher clearly articulates the tension:

> There is a tension between saying we want to develop critical thinkers and then they are saying, we want them to pass the test. Those two things with this test seem mutually exclusive to me. To them that seems OK....[But] those two things don't make sense to me, because I don't think the test is an indication of a critical thinker....I think it assesses whether a kid can pass New York State Regents Test.

Presumably, the new essay grading criteria suggest that the old way of grading essays was insufficient in measuring student achievement. What teachers realized at the practice grading sessions, is that their expectations for student achievement far exceed the state's. This not only confuses and frustrates teachers but, in some cases, it makes them skeptical of state policies. Many teachers are resigned to hang in and wait for the next set of reforms to come along. As one veteran teacher comments, "I'm sure they [the reforms] will be the same for three or four years, and then this will probably all change again, and we'll just be expected to go along with it in the classroom like we always do."

On the surface, state documents appear to be clear in purpose and direction for the new curriculum and assessments. A closer look suggests that the state's purpose and motivation for the recent changes in the curriculum and assessment are anything but clear. Evidence for this point can be found in teachers' responses to interview questions that asked why they thought the state was making these changes. While their responses vary, ultimately, most are unsure of the state's reasoning in terms of curricular and test changes. Similarly, most are unclear as to the state's goals for these changes: What exactly do policymakers hope to accomplish as a result of these reforms? While the state rhetoric about higher standards echo loudly, according to many of these teachers, recent reforms do not coincide with higher standards. Many teachers express confusion because the state's proposed goals of critical thinking and the development of "rich, engaging, and meaningful" programs sound like the same goals that they themselves have harbored for years. Teachers also express frustration that the new curriculum and assessment does not seem to reflect the supposed goals of higher-level thinking and more ambitious thinking and learning.

In one sense, then, lack of clarity on the state's part concerning the focus and motivation for recent reforms only serves to annoy teachers. Is the goal critical thinking and "meaningful" opportunities for learning, or simply higher test scores? Which of the many topics should be stressed in the new curriculum? What kinds of activities will best qualify as "meaningful and valuable?" And what types of activities will best prepare students for a Regents exam that they will have to pass to graduate? When state policies fail to address difficult questions such as these, teachers must decide for themselves. Meanwhile, having made curricular and instructional decisions on their own, influenced mostly by their own ideas about what constitutes good

teaching and learning, teachers often question their own decisions, and wonder if they are in line with state expectations.

The failure of these recent educational reforms to usher in any fundamental or meaningful change may be explained by the conflicting messages inherent in the state curriculum and assessment policies. The uncertainty, frustration, and even skepticism which many teachers are experiencing as a result of these reforms, may be inhibiting them from carrying out the types of changes that would most benefit students.

Implications

Substantive change is always unsettling. So reform on the scale that New York state is attempting in Global History—a new curriculum sequence and a new state test—is bound to generate a measure of frustration, anxiety, and uncertainty. The findings above tell us that while teachers are not necessarily adverse to change, they confront real tensions in responding to the new NYS curriculum and assessment policies. From those tensions, we surmise three implications.

One of those implications is that changes in teachers' practices need not mean improvements in those practices. Teachers tell us they made a range of changes in their content, instruction, and assessment decisions in response to the new global curriculum and test. These changes include the way content is arranged, the use of textbooks, and the frequency of test preparation. In only a few cases, however, do we detect any fundamental change in teachers' practices and no teacher claims the state policies as inspiring more ambitious changes in their teaching and learning. In one sense, then, we conclude that these teachers' reactions represent change, but not improvement. As Corbett and Wilson (1991) discovered in their seminal work on teachers' responses to changes in state tests, we see little evidence to suggest that social studies teaching

and learning is better now than before the new policies. In fact, some teachers argue that their job is more difficult because students find the chronological approach confusing and because teachers are unsure what teaching for "higher standards" means when they apparently hold higher expectations for students' performance on the new test than the state does. That changes are occurring in New York state social studies classrooms is obvious; whether those changes are worthwhile, however, is not.

A second, related implication is a that teachers are emerging confused from their initial encounters with the new curriculum and test. We do not doubt the teachers' sincerity in trying to understand and support the state's efforts. In fact, we wondered why there seemed to be so little outright rebellion among the teachers interviewed. Thus, we conclude that these teachers are not adverse to taking direction from Albany, especially if they perceive state policymakers as having better ideas. But over and over they told us that they are confused on two levels. One level is the definition of the "problem." In other words, it is unclear what problem existed that the new policies were intended to fix. The rhetoric of higher standards aside, these teachers see little in the new policies that promotes more ambitious teaching and learning, and so if there is a problem in their classrooms, they would like to know what it is. The second source of confusion is the "solution." With no clearly defined problem, it is patently unclear how solutions such as new curricula and tests will have any positive effect. In short, the teachers interviewed wonder how new state policies can fix a problem the policymakers have not clearly defined.

One last implication suggests that a sense of mistrust of the state education department may be growing among teachers. If encounters with the new curriculum and test leave most teachers confused and frustrated, we also sense an emerging skepticism about the possibilities for the new policies and a nascent mistrust in state officials. Left struggling to understand what the new

policies represent and why they were enacted, teachers expressed doubts that state policymakers were truly on their side. Teachers did not express anything like a victims mentality, but in their expressions of frustration lie potential seeds of distrust.

Given the complexities of teaching and policy (Grant, 1998), it is not surprising to learn that teachers see much to be concerned about in the new global curriculum and test. What this study suggests is that teachers are not passive participants; not only do they actively interpret and respond to the import of the new state tests, but their interpretations of and responses to the tests matter. New curricula and new tests may provoke some changes in the classroom lives of teachers and students. But the fall-out from teachers' encounters with those policies may ultimately undermine the potential for real and sustained improvement.

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Appendix A

Global History Research Project

Initial Teacher Interview
Spring 2000

NOTE: Recall that we'll give the teachers a brief questionnaire *before* the interview which will solicit much of the background information we're interested in

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL/Initial interview

1 Background

Say that you'd like to begin by reviewing the informant's responses to the questionnaire and clarifying some of her/his responses

a) review/clarify responses to the 1-8 on the questionnaire

2 Opportunities to Learn About Curriculum and Assessment Changes

Say that you'd now like to turn to questions about the opportunities the informant has had to learn about the changes in the state global history curriculum and in the global history exam.

a) review/clarify responses to questions 9 and 10 on the questionnaire

b) for each activity on the questionnaire, ask:

1. who led the activity?
2. tell me why you participated (if not mentioned, probe for: voluntary, encouraged, mandated)?
3. what were the messages conveyed?
4. were there any conflicting/mixed messages?

c) ask "have you participated in any additional activities around the state global history curriculum? the global history exam?" list these on the questionnaire

d) for each activity, ask "what did you think about the session? why do you think this?"

e) *if not already addressed—a*sk, "how prepared do you feel to implement the new global history curriculum and assessment changes?"

3 Influences on Classroom Practice

Say that you'd now like to turn to how the informant is thinking about the state global curriculum and the test in light of her/his classroom practice.

Say you'd like to begin by focusing on the new *global history curriculum*, now and that we will turn to questions about the new global test in a few minutes.

a) ask, "what were your first impressions of the changes in the state curriculum for global?"

- probe for reaction to the change in focus from global studies to global history and geography;
- why the change occurred;
- how it fits with her/his sense of the importance of global knowledge;
- sense of how it compares with her/his teaching practice prior to change?

b) ask, "has your sense of the new global curriculum changed since your first impression? If so, how? If not, can you say why not?"

- probe for what reasons developed for any change

c) ask, "what specific impact has the new global curriculum had on her/his teaching practice?"

- probe for impact on her/his knowledge of the content;
- the all-Regents curriculum
- teaching goals;
- curriculum materials;
- instruction;
- in-class assessment;
- classroom atmosphere;
- use of class time;
- sense of students' ability to handle changes (ask particularly about inclusion students);
- reactions of students to the changes
    - interactions with colleagues and administrators?

d) if it doesn't come up in response to the question above, ask, "please describe one or more classroom lessons and/or units which exemplify the changes you have made in your practice as a result of the new curriculum."

e) ask, "are there any things you are not doing in class now that you would like to?"

- probe for resources and/or changes needed

* * * * *

Say that now you'd like to turn the informant's attention to the global exam.

a) ask, "what were your first impressions of new global tests?"

- probe for reactions to the changes in the multiple choice questions and the changes in the essay questions, particularly the DBQ);
- why they think the changes occurred;
- how these changes fit with her/his sense of assessing students' knowledge of the test;
  - sense of what it meant for her/his test preparation then?

b) ask, "has your sense of the new global exam changed since your first impression? If so, how? If not, can you say why not?"

- probe for what reasons developed for any change?

c) ask, "what specific impact, if any, has the new global exam had on her/his teaching practice?" (remembering to be particularly sensitive to the DBQ question)

- probe for impact on her/his knowledge of the content;
- the all-Regents curriculum
- teaching goals;
- curriculum materials;
- instruction;
- in-class assessment;
- classroom atmosphere;
- use of class time;
- sense of students' ability to handle changes (ask particularly about inclusion students);
  - interactions with colleagues and administrators?

d) if it doesn't come up in response to the question above, ask, "please describe one or more classroom lessons and/or units which exemplify the changes you have made in your practice as a result of the new exam."

e) ask, "are there any things you are not doing in class now that you would like to?"

- probe for resources and/or needed

4 Challenges

Say that you'd like to conclude with some general questions about what lies ahead.

a) ask, "what challenges/concerns do you now feel?"

- how, if at all, do you hope/plan to resolve them?
  - are there any additional issues or concerns that we haven't talked about?
  - (*if they don't come up*) probe for availability of instructional resources, models of assessments, intervention resources for students, pressures from administrators, colleagues, parents, others?

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